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By Electronic Mail to JUD.Testimony@cga.ct.gov

March 17, 2016

Joint Committee on Judiciary
Room 2500, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Letter in Support of Governor's Proposed Bills S.B. 426 & S.B. 428

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

On behalf of the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association (Crawford), I write to express strong support for proposed bills S.B. 426 and S.B. 428. Crawford was proud to support the original 2012 legal services funding initiative, which saved Connecticut's legal services programs from the devastating collapse of IOLTA funding in 2008, as well as S.B. 31, which sought to support the stabilization and recovery of legal services programs by removing the sunset provision from 2012 court filing fees increase.

Our organizations represent the interests of many of Connecticut's Black lawyers, judges, legal professionals and law students. We share a common interest in the goals of ensuring access to justice by the communities of color that we represent, and every lawyer's ethical responsibility to support and participate in the provision of legal services to the poor. We personally recognize the need for vibrant legal services programs in Connecticut, as more and more individuals appear *pro se* before Connecticut courts. We are also familiar with the hard work of Connecticut's legal services organizations, and their attorneys, and cannot emphasize enough the importance of maintaining such a vital service.


Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid and New Haven Legal Assistance help over 10,000 low-income people every year. These organizations provide much-needed free legal assistance to low-income families facing imminent homelessness, victims of domestic violence, disabled adults and children seeking state and federal benefits, elderly individuals facing problems with nursing homes and collection actions, among countless other civil legal

difficulties. The need for such legal services continues to grow, and S.B. 426 and 428 would ensure a steady and reliable source of funding for legal services in the future.

These bills would ensure the continued provision of quality legal services to Connecticut's most vulnerable populations. Legal aid programs reduce the number of unrepresented people flooding the courts, and help marshal pro bono legal help for the poor from the private bar. Reductions in legal services will increase costs in other safety net programs and delay access to justice to everyone who needs access to our courts.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter of support. We sincerely hope that you will support these initiatives to maintain and increase a stable and reliable source of funding for legal services to the disadvantaged.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Genea O. Bell", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Genea O. Bell, Esq,
President, George W. Crawford Black Bar Association